

Genetics to Play Leading Role in Public Health

"Is your state ready for the genomic era?"

This question introduces the ASTHO June 2003 publication, *Genomics: a Guide for Public Health*. "Genomics is just a fancy word for genetics," said Sylvia Au, Hawaii Department of Public Health genetics program coordinator at an Oct. 18 technical assistance session in Kansas City.

"Along with health behaviors and environmental issues, genetics determines the health of a population." Au says that health can be thought of as triangle with health behaviors, environment, and genetics along each edge of the triangle. The role of public health in addressing health behaviors and environment is well established. The role of public health in addressing the third side of the triangle, genetics, can be significant.



KDHE staff from the Division of Health and Environmental Laboratories, Office of Health Promotion, and the Bureau for Children, Youth and Families attended the recent technical assistance in order to learn how to address genetic issues through public health.

Among the meeting's recommendations were: development of public education programs that increase consumer knowledge; work to increase the public health infrastructure for genetics and the workforce of qualified genetic counselors; help to expand genetics education and training for health professionals; foremost was initiation of a state planning process to chart a course for the future.